

‘The Cry of Women’: Three Shakespearean Females and Their Speech

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by

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## I. Theory: Dual Linguistic and Feminist Approach

What this research aims to accomplish is not only the exploration of linguistic power, but also to determine the criteria for what constitutes an accessible and gender-equal, not gender neutral, verbal wellspring. The English language by its very nature has gendered subjects and declension systems, so 'gender-neutral' when applied to this particular language becomes an unrealistic hypothetical. This paper is not equipped to examine the gender neutral possibilities that exist in other foreign languages, but it should be acknowledged that certain translations of Shakespeare can impact the gender-language conversation. Just as the male gender is allotted certain powers, so too are masculine speech patterns. However, Shakespeare's women confound the patriarchal pattern of oppressed, unintelligent women who are solely domestic. Women are often center stage, deliver important messages, commit murder, and overthrow kings. However, women are also murdered by jealous husbands, enveloped in the wings, and are made the butt of sexually exploitative jokes. All of these instances represent an expression of agency and oppression, scenarios often involving gender relations and gendered language usage.

The simultaneous involvement of these two components encourages this project to incorporate two types of theoretical frameworks: feminist criticism and linguistics. While linguists have studied comparative differences in language usage between genders, it has been in studies with select samples and various research goals, which span from language development to shifts in speaking among various groups. These studies have occurred in a variety of laboratory, educational, and social environments. Feminist theory is situated in broader cultural and historical contexts, relying heavily on philosophy with a few overlaps in research outside of academia. Critics like Kristeva and Irigaray will act as complementary voices to those of Chomsky and McConnell-Ginet in order to analyze the language's potential to shape power (or

lack thereof). Politics and power are very broad and loaded terms, however, so this project chooses three of Shakespeare's women who appear to fit case "types" that display different interests in the exploration of gender-power dynamics. Three Shakespearean women will receive a lengthy analysis in their appropriate section, but a brief description is as follows: Lady Macbeth serves as a femme fatale, Desdemona embodies the woman as victim, and Mistress Quickly plays the clown. The order of these women listed represent where they would fall on the theoretical spectrum of gendered language. For example, Lady Macbeth as a femme fatale exerts the most masculine power over her husband while implementing charismatic language to drive political events. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Mistress Quickly's language usage hinges on her comedic role and the corresponding sexual and social commentary about the events in Windsor. What linguistic data does Lady Macbeth's speech display about her willingness to be "unsexed" and serve as the impetus for her husband's rise and fall? Does Mistress Quickly's distortion of Latin into sexual innuendo render her the typical unschooled female, or is comedic language as much a force of agency as Desdemona's fatal persistence?

In order to answer these questions properly, the theoretical frameworks mentioned here must supply the proper terminology for the ultimate research goal: if language is inevitably gendered, as argued by McConnell-Ginet, Irigaray, and Kristeva, how can both sexes utilize "female" and "male" speech with equivalent access, usage, and knowledge of terms? Non-essentialist feminist analysis of language argues that "we all use the same language but that we have different *interests*...taken to mean political and power-related interests" (emphasis mine, Moi 158). According to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, words act as instruments that reinforce the gender binary. In stereotype, masculine words sound aggressive, political, and certain. Feminine language would be characterized by passivity, obeisance, and question.

While labels are not universally applicable to something as arbitrary as language, categorizing the environments in which women speak can provide insight for usage and appropriation. According to Sally McConnell-Ginet, author of *Gender, Sexuality, and Meaning*, there are ways of speaking with others in certain contexts. She distinguishes between different types of speakers, called “communities of practice,” and how their specific usage is deliberately targeted to an audience (McConnell-Ginet 17). If this terminology is to be appropriately applied, a distinction must be made between the classes of Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, and Mistress Quickly. The previous two women fall in the sphere of nobility, wealth, and royal courts. Quickly, however, is an innkeeper’s wife who would be more affiliated with the merchant class and rustic domesticity. It is within this class difference that McConnell-Ginet makes the case for the two levels of meaning. One is “content,” or the message expressed, and the other is “style,” where the language shapes the personae of speakers, the attitude assumed towards others and towards the original content expressed (McConnell Ginet 12). It is reasonable to assume that content can be articulated unconsciously while style is a product of the cultural sphere inhabited by the speaker.

Noam Chomsky explains this impact when he asserts “the capacity of language formation is constantly at work, not only in extending the system of concepts, but also in recreating it” (Chomsky 20). His book, *Modern Issues in Linguistic Theory*, not only outlines the formation and acquisition of language, but offers a hierarchy of language components that will be helpful in analyzing examples of gendered language. According to his research on the linguist Saussure, Chomsky regards “sentence formation as a matter of *parole* rather than *langue*, or free and voluntary action rather than systematic rule” (Chomsky 25). Just as McConnell-Ginet distinguishes “content” and “style,” so too does Chomsky with “parole” and “langue.” Langue

can be best described as an inventory of linguistic elements. These elements include syllables, utterances, and stressed or unstressed emphases. All of these examples describe a single linguistic element, or parole. Since paroles constitute a langue, language comparisons should consist of data that involve not only words themselves, but frequency of usage, tense, and how the statement made of paroles is framed. For example, if we are to compare Desdemona's speaking in Act I to her death throes in Act V, the paroles and the langue categories they possess are both important.

In order to simplify the broad and abstract theory of what Chomsky called langue, this project will also propose specific criteria for the frequency of usage components. While language is an arbitrary system, availability of words and phrasing is a result of exposure, education, socioeconomic class, and, most importantly for my project, gender. By combining modern linguistic theory with Kristeva's theory of semiotics, a discussion space is created where gender and language can create a hybrid theoretical framework. Kristeva's theory of semiotics is one that relies on the building blocks of the language Chomsky describes, but attempts to "conceive of meaning not as a sign-system but as a signifying process" (Kristeva 28). The speaking subjects and their constraints are no longer seen as passive objects subject to a system beyond their control, but become agents in what McConnell-Ginet would call "communities of practice." These communities are defined by factors of their environment, such as social class, level of education, and the gender of persons they communicate with. McConnell-Ginet asserts that it is reasonable that a female speaker employs different speech styles and components when speaking alone (monologue) compared to when they speak with a man or woman present. This assertion fulfills one of four criteria McConnell-Ginet articulates for influences of "Feminist Linguistic

Repertoire” (McConnell-Ginet 67): dependent on the social bond between speakers, verbal interchange is replaced with quality or purpose of speech.

McConnell-Ginet’s other criteria will be explained and applied to all three women discussed, but these linguistic arguments fail to address gender discussions of transformation, like in Lady Macbeth’s unsexing speech, or the lethal consequences that face women if they attempt to adopt male-associated speech. Instead of theorizing a give and take relationship between language and the sexes, McConnell-Ginet’s theory operates on what linguistic freedoms women have within female-female communication. Combining this linguistic-gender skeleton with feminist theory, primarily Kristeva and Irigaray, with new linguistic criteria can attempt to illustrate how these Shakespearean women perform the effect of language on the institutions of marriage, class, and gender.

#### I. Lady Macbeth: Most Outspoken, Dies Invisible

As mentioned earlier, this research places three of Shakespeare’s female characters on a spectrum of either extreme masculine language or feminine language. Starting at one end of the spectrum, masculine language is where Lady Macbeth is placed. A highly visible, charismatic, and influential woman, she is also a wife, queen, and supposedly a mother. In one of her most impassioned speeches to her husband, she claims that she knows what it is to “have given suck, and know/How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me” (I.vii.55-56), but she believes so strongly in the principle of resolve that she would have “dash[ed] the brains out” (I.vii.58) of her child if she were as weak as her husband. Here, the act of murdering Duncan is equaled with the horror of a mother unnaturally killing her own offspring. By creating this unsettling scenario, Lady Macbeth is asserting herself as the anti-patriarchal woman, the opposite of a fragile creature whose sole purpose is to reproduce. She is also displaying a dark political fortitude,

subconsciously convincing her husband that the ease of killing Duncan, who is no blood relation, should be simple for a man if a woman is able to kill her own child.

It is never clarified if the “babe” mentioned is Lady Macbeth’s child or if she was only at one point capable of nursing. This line lacks further theatric development, showing that the categorization of her womanhood as “mother” is overshadowed by her powers of persuasion, ruthlessness, and political determination. All of these traits have been socially classified as male, but Lady Macbeth does not explicitly assume a “masculine” identity. The audience meets Lady Macbeth for the first time in a scene where she reads a letter from her husband, describing his encounter with the three witches. Her first spoken lines are not her own thoughts, but rather an act of ventriloquizing her husband’s. At one point, she reads one of his sentences describing her as his “dearest partner of greatness” (I.v.10). It is this egalitarian statement that fuels critical consensus of this union being Shakespeare’s happiest marriage, but it is clear that in the play’s beginning, this partnership is driven by the force of Lady Macbeth’s ambition.

If we closely examine the language used to describe her ambition, there are recognizable gendered constructs surrounding key words. She fears her husband is unable to accomplish the prophesied rise in status the witches promise, describing his “nature” as “too full o’ the milk of human kindness” (I.v.15). The meaning surrounding milk involuntarily evokes images of woman, mother, and selfless nourishment. These archetypal traits of the female, traits that Lady Macbeth attributes to her husband, will hinder his success. She clarifies that he is “not without ambition, but without/The illness should attend it” (I.v.17-18). In Lady Macbeth’s opinion, ambition means nothing if wickedness and lack of conscience do not assist in the enterprise. This particularly Machiavellian rendering of a woman is unique, since the agency of Desdemona and

Mistress Quickly rely on more socially acceptable ideas about women, such as appealing to their husbands or undermining freedom of movement by playing dumb.

Lady Macbeth is markedly transparent about her intentions, but only when she is alone and speaking in dramatic monologue. While the audience is present, monologues in their very nature act as introspective speech, with the speaker often presenting their character for examination and discussion with the audience. Lady Macbeth's speech functions similarly to Richard III's famed "winter of our discontent" monologue. Unlike her male counterpart, however, Lady Macbeth does not open the play or proclaim herself determined to prove a villain. Instead, she wishes for her husband's swift return, so "That I may pour my spirits in thine ear/And chastise with the valour of my tongue/All that impedes thee from the golden round" (I.v.24-26). 'Spirits' (from the Latin, *spiritus*) in line 24 is a beautiful descriptor for the physical breath used to form her words. These words are personified as sentient beings, which perform the act of 'chastisement' with the tongue characterized as a valorous weapon. While the verb 'chastise' is often associated with images of the scold or shrew wife, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "to amend, reform, or improve (a person or thing)" (OED 2016). Rather than a harpy who emasculates a weak husband, this connotation describes a political agent. Instead of a passive wife and queen, Lady Macbeth is an active counselor, operating the machinery needed for her husband's coronation to become a reality.

As to the gender of this counselor, Lady Macbeth's unsexing speech is her most memorable, second only to her mad scene. As she anticipates the arrival of her husband and Duncan, she adopts an imperative voice: "Come, you spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,/And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/Of the direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,/Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,/That no compunctious visitings of



nature/Shake my fell purpose” (I.v.38-45). Even though she is asking for the erasure of her female sex, never does she directly request to be made a man. Instead, there is emphasis on changing the internal components of the body itself. Lady Macbeth encourages the spirits to “Come to my woman’s breasts,/And take my milk for gall” (I.v.45-46). This is another reference to the act of nursing and subsequent perversion of a female biological marker, but the breasts themselves are not removed and Lady Macbeth’s body is not magically augmented with a penis. There is also no articulation of intent to adopt the garb of a male, cross-dressing being an effective tool for Shakespearean women like Rosalind and Portia. Instead, Lady Macbeth is more concerned with the physiological connection between emotion and the body, best outlined in early modern humoral theory.

Even though it was a system established by the ancient Greeks, early modern physicians found the system of bodily humors appealing to their sense of categorization. This was especially helpful in distinguishing male and female personality traits. A man’s aggression could be the result of excessive blood, while a woman’s tears could indicate a melancholic, black-bile dominated temperament. In Gail Kern Paster’s comprehensive book, *The Body Embarrassed*, she explores the social and gender constructs that accompanied early modern humoral theory. Concerned with establishing a connection between the ‘inner’ body and ‘outer’ socially constructed body, Paster claims that humoral theory was a major influence on the discourse concerning early modern gendered bodies (Paster 3). Lady Macbeth does not make any requests for swapping female humors for male ones, but offers her milk as currency for gall. According to the OED, “gall” is bile that is secreted from the liver and is associated with bitterness. It also encompasses two of the four humors (black and yellow bile) and by extension melancholic and choleric temperaments. Those with melancholic temperaments become preoccupied with

tragedy, doing things independently, and may suffer from depression (Lindemann 30). Choleric temperaments often display traits of aggression, passion, and the desire to instill these things in others (Lindemann 34). Lady Macbeth displays many if not all of these traits throughout the play, demonstrating a progression from choleric behaviors in Act I to melancholic behaviors towards her death. This humoral change may be reflected in her alterations of speech (such as madness and one line instances).

When her husband enters the scene, Lady Macbeth continues to retain control over the dialogue. Her mode of address is one of authority, a staccato of imperatives when she advises “Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye.../look like the innocent flower, /But be the serpent under it” (I.v.62-64). Her commanding speech structure demands her husband’s focus, calling the audience’s attention to an implied lack of emotional stealth. She describes his face as a literal open book, a place where “men may read strange matters” (I.v.61). Such transparency for a man is a lack of political finesse, but for a woman it can easily be reconfigured as emotional fragility and incapability of restraint. While this is a single line spoken in a moment, it is here that Lady Macbeth and her husband are represented as the opposite of their gender stereotypes. It is this switch that makes Lady Macbeth appear inherently ‘masculine,’ even though this is not stated in her appeal to the unsexing powers.

Lady Macbeth does not simply rely on her words. Uncertain of their powers, she utilizes the domestic dimension of a noblewoman’s wife to her advantage. By commanding household servants to prepare a welcoming meal for Duncan, Lady Macbeth is creating an environment of false security and also presenting herself and her husband as the least likely suspects for his murder. This explains the urgency behind her argument for putting “This night’s great business into my dispatch,/Which shall to all our nights and days to come/Give solely sovereign sway and

masterdom” (I.v.66-68). Even though Macbeth murders Duncan, Lady Macbeth crafts the circumstances to ensnare the king as unsuspecting prey.

Macbeth is hesitant, morality predicated on his beliefs concerning family and kingship, referring to himself as Duncan’s kinsman and subject (I.vii.12). He replies to her plot with “We will speak further” (I.v.68). The tone of this statement shows an attempt to reestablish patriarchal authority, but Lady Macbeth does not take notice. She continues to speak with imperatives, ending the scene with an emphatic reassurance: “Leave all the rest to me” (I.v.71). Even though she begins her introductory scene reading her husband’s words, she ends it by claiming power in her own.

The certainty of her cunning shows in the next scene, when she welcomes the king and his entourage. Duncan calls her “our honored hostess” (I.vi.10), dramatic irony at its most beautiful since the audience is already aware of Lady Macbeth’s murderous ambition. Duncan is made sympathetic, perhaps even pitiful, as he apologizes for the inconvenience his stay at the castle may cause her. As his subjects, not only the king but the other nobles must be fed, housed, and attended upon all at the expense of the Thane of Glamis. Lady Macbeth’s reply is obligatory, thanking the king for the “honours.../Your majesty loads [upon] our house” (i.vi.17-18). A visit from a king may be costly, but it also showed favor and the possibility of a rise in status. The rise Lady Macbeth envisions, however, is not another title or parcel of land given to her husband.

Lady Macbeth’s language shifts when her husband’s resolve to murder does. As he expresses his desire to “proceed no further in this business” (I.vii.11), she utilizes rhetorical questions that act as marked statements of incredulity. She berates his fickle courage: “Hath it slept since? And wakes it now so green and pale/At what it did so freely? From this time/Such I account thy love” (I.vii.36-39). Even though the audience has not been witness to an explicit agreement to kill

Duncan, Lady Macbeth is disgusted with her husband's lack of commitment to the plan.

According to Gina Bloom, author of *Voice in Motion*, the early modern perception of voice was material, something made in the body yet transient after reception by the listener (Bloom 9). She also describes voice as having discrete components, a "substance with economic, theatrical, and mechanical dimensions" (Bloom 6). If this thought is applied to Lady Macbeth's way of speaking, then the audience does not see her simply as a frustrated wife but a partner who feels betrayed in a transaction.

While the rapid succession of questions seems shrewish in nature, there is strategy behind the passion. The multitude of questions reaches their peak when she states that his love for her can be just as wavering. Bloom's book argues that common opinion of male speech is that it demonstrates "self-restraint," which was "a defining trait of early modern masculinity" (Bloom 10). If it's opposite is female speech, then it is fair to assume that rapid, intemperate speech would be its components. While Lady Macbeth is speaking with passion, there is calculated restraint as she moves from question to question, ending with a final assessment scorning his alleged love for her. This pattern calls attention to Macbeth's lack of not only commitment to murder, but commitment to his woman. If a true man were to have full and utter possession of his wife in heart and body, wouldn't this possession lead to bravery in the face of risk? This is the patriarchal paradigm that Lady Macbeth is manipulating to her advantage.

The style and mode of this speech is also one that parallels a general rallying of the troops or, more bluntly, a man reminding another man of his responsibility to embody the masculine traits of courage, ambition, and lust for power. However, there is dissonance since this male focused language is coming from a female speaker. Despite her unsexing speech, Lady Macbeth's femininity is ironically magnified as she attempts to speak in a male style. Luce Irigaray, French

feminist critic and author of “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” argues that mimicry of male speech such as Lady Macbeth’s renders a parodic gender performance through an incorporation of female elements of speech while demanding to speak as a male subject (Irigaray 124). To play with mimicry, Irigaray claims a woman must resubmit herself to discursive exploitation by recognizing her feminine speech and replacing it with a pseudo-male voice. This mimesis however is indicative of women’s ability “of bringing new nourishment to its [language’s] operation” (Irigaray 125).

This new nourishment occurs when Lady Macbeth responds to Macbeth’s fear of failure. She professes a fearless and perhaps exasperated “We fail! / But screw your courage to the sticking-place/And we’ll not fail” (I.vii.59-61). This moment of courage again highlights her perspective in their marriage: she sees it as a partnership that relies on the mutual ambitions of the other. Gone is any hint of fragility, dependency, or fear. Here she speaks with bravado, a male form of verbal gusto. This determined statement holds the reader’s and Macbeth’s attention as she outlines in detail the plan to kill Duncan and frame his guards by smearing them in his blood (I.vii.61-72).

In awe of his dauntless wife, Macbeth remarks that her courage and “undaunted mettle should compose/Nothing but males” (I.vii.74-75). This remark is made in a positive light, but again draws attention to the primary function of Lady Macbeth’s female body. This feminine mark of reproduction cannot escape her. In the moments when she speaks, however, her femininity becomes near invisible to the reader and less relevant to a theatrical audience. Lady Macbeth makes very few references to her gender and thus does not present the opportunity for gendered stereotypes to occur. Rather, the images of womanhood, motherhood, and sexuality are provoked by Macbeth’s references to childbearing, false faces, and false hearts (I.vii.83).

Lady Macbeth opens another scene in Act 2, but it is the first time she introduces the actions of the play in her own voice. Just as in Act I, Scene v, she is alone on stage and speaking to the audience. However, it is after she manages the deeds of an accomplice that we see her afraid for the first time. Starting at a noise, she reassures herself that it was nothing more than an owl, but in performance this sound could be the final scream of the murdered Duncan. Interesting lines that have Freudian connotations are the ones in which she makes her claim that if Duncan had not resembled her own father, then she would have done the deed herself (II.ii.12-13). This presents the possibility that Lady Macbeth chooses to embrace or disinherit certain dimensions of her character. She is willing to not be a woman, to play the role of partner instead of wife, but she is unwilling to violate the role of a filial daughter.

This reference to a masculine figure of protection, both in physical and economic contexts, is reinforced when Macbeth enters and she addresses him as husband (II.ii.14). Gone is the egalitarian term of 'partner' once she labels him this way, because her assumed label as a result is 'wife,' with all of its subordinating constructs. Previously, she refers to him purely by his titles, which suggests a gender-based equality since they are both nobles. Her change of address is not the only shift in her speech. After Macbeth commits the murder, he is overwhelmed by dark guilty thoughts, dominating the conversation in a desperate frenzy of sentences, leaving Lady Macbeth to hastily reply in two lines or less. She counsels her husband to preoccupy his thoughts with deception instead of damnation, or else "it will make us mad" (II.ii.33). A prophetic foreshadowing of her own eventual madness, she is ignored by Macbeth as he repeats again and again how he has murdered sleep, both Duncan's and his own (II.ii.41-42).

Lady Macbeth, as a sharp contrast, has control over or no remorse at all as a result of her appeal in Act I. Instead of agonizing over the act of murder, she thinks with practicality,

attempting to reorient her husband's thinking towards framing the grooms and "wash[ing] this filthy witness from your hand" (II.ii.45). The choice to describe blood as 'witness' underscores how Duncan's death occurs offstage, with Macbeth's bloodstained hands the visible marker of the deed. Lady Macbeth also dies offstage in Act V, but Duncan's offstage death is one orchestrated by others and out of his control. Lady Macbeth, however, reasserts her own control when she realizes Macbeth is unable to even go near Duncan's chambers. She ridicules Macbeth for his weakness, decrying his guilt as "brain-sickly" and as undermining his "noble strength" (II.ii.42-43). There is sexual imagery that is provoked here, since unbend is also defined as 'slacken' and strength is often associated with virility. Lady Macbeth's choice of words paints Macbeth as a man suffering from a dual dysfunction, sexual and political. Recognizing that time is of the essence, Lady Macbeth snatches the daggers from her husband and streaks the faces of the grooms with Duncan's blood. No longer is she simply the wife who persuaded her husband to kill a king, but an active accomplice in framing and causing the death of two innocents.

She emerges later with stained hands, which causes her to think of how her external mark may match her now marked (for hell) soul. She comments on how they are again equal, their hands the same color, but she is ashamed "to wear a heart so white" (II.ii.63). A white-washing reference common to other Shakespeare works, Lady Macbeth is relying on her gendered body, a feminine façade, to disguise a crime men cannot deem women capable of. Playing the role of the shocked and horrified bystanders, Lady Macbeth and her husband join the others in an attempt to avoid being suspect. Macbeth is still in the grip of his guilt-ridden mind, daring to describe Duncan's corpse as a brutally destroyed body "laced with...golden blood,/And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature/For ruin's wasteful entrance" (II.iii.109-111). Macbeth's impassioned description makes the assassination of a king equivalent to the death of a martyred

saint. However, the source of this passionate speech can easily be questioned, framed as the rambling of a guilty man's conscience. Lady Macbeth recognizes this possibility, and averts attention from her husband's talk by pretending to faint (II.iii.115). By manipulating the stereotype that women are feeble and unable to handle high stress situations, Lady Macbeth is performing an act where her performance, a product of patriarchal and subordinated femininity, is not only a distraction but also an act of political agency. There is no possibility that a dutiful wife, faint of heart and stricken with grief over death in her house, could be perceived as an instigator of regicide.

Despite the power of this duality, Lady Macbeth's presence is not made noticeable in this scene until a large amount of male dialogue has been uttered. Compared to the powerful intimacy that was produced when the only speakers present were her and Macbeth, the increase in male presence dilutes the saliency of her own. This may be the reason why her number of lines drastically drops, decreasing her on stage visibility as well as her assertive voice. If and when she is able to speak, it is to demonstrate her role as queen but purely in a domestic function. The intimacy of the relationship she had with Macbeth appears to have disintegrated by Act III, where she sends a servant with the request that she may "attend his leisure/For a few words" (III.ii.3-4). This is the third scene once again initiated by her voice, but instead of stealthily planning murder or speaking in her husband's voice (actions that assume a male association), she asks a brief and abruptly worded question about Banquo. When she does manage to address her husband, it is for the first time on stage since Duncan's murder. The previous scenes have been composed of male-male interactions, temporarily removing Lady Macbeth from stage, sight, and mind.



The interaction between Lady Macbeth and her husband is one that communicates anxiety and distance. She questions why he keeps to himself, entertaining “sorriest fancies your companions making,/Using those thoughts which should indeed have died/With them they think on?/...What’s done is done” (III.ii.10-14). Gone is the fortifying, rousing tone of her previous speeches, where she was so easily able to convince her husband through reassuring imperatives. This section begins with a question and ends with an ultimatum Macbeth ignores. Instead of being able to perform the political, collected attitude his wife and the situation demand of him, he ruminates upon the crime which has doomed his “mind to lie/In restless ecstasy” (III.ii.23-24). The frenzied mindset of the king is reinforced by the disproportionate amount of lines allotted to him and his wife, respectively. When comparing this scene to Lady Macbeth’s very first, the dominant voice in the dialogue has switched. Lady Macbeth is allotted one sentence lines, feeble interjections in Macbeth’s manic musings. Their roles as plotter and instrument have also changed, with Lady Macbeth being unaware of Macbeth’s conspiracy to murder Banquo and Fleance. When Macbeth reacts violently to Banquo’s ghost, Lady Macbeth’s domestic role hastily expands into a mother managing the distempers of childish madness. Macbeth’s insanity threatens to unravel not only himself but their carefully constructed image as rightful inheritors of Duncan’s crown. If the nobles become aware of why he is so agitated, Macbeth draws more attention to himself as a murder suspect. Lady Macbeth desperately sends the nobles out, aware of the risk her husband’s vision poses, but also prevents the production of positive cheer at court. What better way to forget Duncan’s murder and accept the new sovereigns than for the nobles to be entertained and distracted from past events?

This fact shows that Lady Macbeth is no longer conducting the great business of murdering a king but is now in the act of assimilating the new one, her husband, into the fabric

of court life. In this life, her reprimands to Macbeth when he fears Banquo's ghost not only display a political agenda but one that desires for their previous domestic happiness and normalcy. However, this domestic balance rests on the assumption of gender binaries, with the male occupying the political sphere and the woman the private sphere. This division has been argued as anachronistic, since women have played a role in public businesses. This is especially so with records indicating that women have been employed by playhouses with regards to costumes and props. The theory of public/private division is perhaps more applicable beginning in the Victorian period. By plotting and acting as an accomplice to murder a king, Lady Macbeth has violated this separation. According to patriarchal belief then, it would only seem natural that the relationship with her husband has suffered. Yet, this is not her ultimate punishment.

After her desperate attempt to create domestic felicity and failing miserably, it is five more scenes until Lady Macbeth reappears on stage. In this time, Macbeth has consulted with the witches (who themselves represent the unholy and unbridled chaotic elements of the feminine) and ordered the murder of Macduff's family. There is a striking resemblance between the characters of Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff, especially when it comes to their estimation of their husbands. However, the articulation of their roles is quite different. As Lady Macbeth fears her husband's political weakness, Lady Macduff is more agitated with her husband's willingness to leave his family. She ironically calls his flight "madness" (IV.ii.3), claiming that his actions would warrant guilt where there is none. Lady Macduff's rebuttal to an absent husband portrays her as an unwitting victim but nonetheless a vindicated wife. Rather than surrender to fear, she likens his abandonment to that of his own death, joking with her son about the death of his traitor father (IV.ii.38-45). This brief scene shows an eerie alternative to what Lady Macbeth's life would have been like if she too had living children and a husband labeled as a traitor. Without

the guarantee of male protection in a world controlled by men, Lady Macduff may be speaking in jest but a new husband would have been necessary for her survival.

Unlike Lady Macbeth, who is able to keep her husband close as an element of political and physical protection, Lady Macduff and her son suffer at the hands of assassins. Forced to witness her son's death, she flees from the stage screaming 'murder' as a desperate attempt for help. The woman's voice is futile in its effort as it is reported later that Macduff's entire family is murdered. Even though her death is offstage, she gets the final dramatic word which calls attention to the moral violation of killing. She is not only Lady Macbeth's foil but an innocent casualty in the destruction set in motion by the Macbeths' murderous ambitions.

Even though Lady Macduff's murder should be equivalent with Duncan's, since both are pawns removed in political killings, there is more pathos generated when comparing the murder of a mother and child to that of a man. Duncan's murder represents Lady Macbeth's bold invasion of the male sphere, but the murder of Macduff's family acts as a form of backlash, into the female sphere. Lady Macbeth's assumption of male ambition therefore carries institutional consequences, not solely personal or marital. It is after this moment that her ultimate punishment arrives: loss of control over her speech.

Lady Macbeth's scene of madness is iconic in the dramatic canon, one of the scenes most strongly associated with the play in the public consciousness. Her madness is characterized initially by her unawareness of present listeners, speaking a monologue in an inappropriate environment. The repetitive motion of wringing her hands is characteristic of female agitation. Yet, the spot that Lady Macbeth so fiercely wishes to clean from her skin is a delusion. This hints at the popular belief that a distinct mark on the body is indicative of a marked, immoral soul, but the mark is visible only to Lady Macbeth and no one else. Unlike deformed and

diseased people with visible markers of difference, this now insane queen is creating difference where there is none.

This is perhaps one of the play's darkest ironies, since before this moment Lady Macbeth was the verbal equivalent, if not superior, of a man. She was political, ruthless, and able to manipulate her speech to be heard and heeded by a predominately male court. Her madness is most heartbreaking to the feminist reader because she is unable to control her speaking voice. She begins by obsessing over her blood-stained hands, only to begin admonishing her husband who is not there (V.i.30-33). Distorted fragments of her previously rousing speeches are made into unnecessarily worded questions. Compare the line "Screw your courage to the sticking place" (I.vii.60) to her frenzied reassurance: "What need we fear who knows it when none can/Call our power to account?" (V.i.32-33). Her phrasing is no longer concise and self-assured but doubtful and reliant on the hallucinatory presence of her husband.

Irigaray's criticism in *The Power of Discourse* describes the tired trope of the feminine "always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy" (Irigaray 119). Lady Macbeth's mad language shows such deficiency, the mirror image of the masculine restraint so easily adopted in the play's first half. Her ability to mimic male language has come to an end once her actions have had consequences for another fellow woman, Lady Macduff. Toril Moi's discussion of Lacanian philosophy in her book, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, suggests that uncontrolled speech is a symptom of a retreat to the realm of the Imaginary. While purely a philosophical construct, this suggestion does carry sexual connotations as the Imaginary realm relies on the dependence of the subject on the mother. In other words, to form the self as a "self-speaking" person, separation between the mother and child is necessary. To formulate active statements such as "I am" means to also "represent the existence of repressed desire" (Moi 100). This heavily Freudian

interpretation is unlikely, but frames potential thinking around Lady Macbeth's statement about Duncan.

Lady Macbeth and Duncan are not blood relations, but she is mentally haunted by the gruesome imagery of his corpse, pitifully asking "who would have thought the/ Old man to have had so much blood in him?" (V.i.33-34). It is this phrase that ultimately incriminates her and her husband, a sort of tormented confession wrung from the conscience of a surrogate daughter. The adoption of male speech, male ambition, and male murder does not only affect the wife-husband relationship but the other patriarchal relationships of daughter-father and mother-child. In summary, Lady Macbeth's loss of speech seems like an apt, institutionally delivered punishment for her upheaval of these binaries.

In accordance with the terms defined by Chomsky, Lady Macbeth's access to parole, or utterances, does not change. Rather, it is the langue that reflects a regression from collected strategic (male) speaking to childlike anguish (female). The height of her madness is when she is literally bemoaning her despair of even the blood's smell. She laments how even "the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!" (V.i.43). The repeated, impassioned utterance lends the line a sort of gasping effect, escalating towards a wail or a scream. The extreme opposite of formal restraint in language is that of the screeching cry. Animal in nature, it can also be paralleled to cries of sexual pleasure, childbirth, and grievous mourning wails. The ancients had longstanding myths surrounding women and uncontrolled sound, from the Egyptians, who designating female mourners for wailing, to the Bacchanals of ancient Greece (Mystakidou 535). Women who suffered from hyper-sexuality exhibited their "hysteria" through manic, expressive sounds and bodily contortion.

The very word, hysteria, has its roots in the Greek *hystera*, meaning ‘uterus.’ Jean-Martin Charcot popularized the theory through his graphically illustrated public records of not only hypnosis treatments but also more sexual, questionable. Believed at first to be a symptom of sexual dysfunction, Charcot concluded that the disease was instead psychological (Didi-Huberman 72). While this is not necessarily a condition Lady Macbeth suffers from, the trope of the ‘mad woman’ has strong associations not just with language and psychology but also the perceived sexuality of women. If she was willing to adopt male language and male politics, is it a fair assumption to think she would demand an equal level of sexual ownership? The relationship between her and Macbeth at the play’s opening is very intimate and suggests a healthy level of sexual attraction. By the play’s end, however, there is a strong sense of avoidance. It is chilling to see the afflicted Lady Macbeth surrounded by her ladies and a doctor, but her husband seems to be completely unaware of her illness. In fact, it appears that he and Lady Macbeth have no personal contact whatsoever between her madness and death.

Lady Macbeth’s suicide is frustratingly unsatisfying for the feminist reader. Occurring offstage, with no indication of her method, her death is reported by Seyton, a minor and unrecognizable nobleman who is one of Macbeth’s few remaining supporters. Her death is announced first, however, by “the cry of women,” an ambiguous phrase that could have various meanings. Is this Lady Macbeth’s final articulation of breath as she kills herself? Is it her ladies discovering her corpse? This is not explained, but the very phrase itself hints at an ominous nature. The scene which not only reveals the Queen’s death is also the realization that Macbeth’s castle is surrounded by Macduff and Malcolm’s troops. Is Lady Macbeth’s suicide an ill omen or portent, prophesying Macbeth’s imminent defeat? It would appear so, since Macbeth placidly answers the news of his wife’s death with “She should have died hereafter” (V.v.17). There are

no tears for his former partner in greatness, no mourning equivalent to that of Macduff's when he hears of his family's slaughter. There is instead a resigned, gloomy self-absorption about the endless "tomorrows" taunting man with life's meaninglessness (V.v.18-27).

Lady Macbeth's suicide, while reported as a peripheral event, does hold meaning. Suicide is an action of great agency, committed by desperate people but often with strong emotional resolve. Suicide was also considered honorable in battle, a way to avoid the shame of capture by the enemy. Suicide is also a statement of control, deciding how and when life will end. Many have compared this to "playing God," but in the context of this essay I suggest a rewording of this phrase. Instead of "playing God," Lady Macbeth is "playing Man." As her adoption of male language, ambition, and emotion correlate with her actions, her death also acts as a form of performance. The irony present, however, is that the visibility of this performance is non-existent, whereas Macbeth dies a dramatic death onstage. Is Lady Macbeth's offstage suicide further punishment for her unnatural assumption of male language? Perhaps, but it also reinforces the diminished significance of her stage presence. As the woman mimicking man, Lady Macbeth is the "bad wife," denied any possibility of audience sympathy at the play's end. In marked contrast, Desdemona's emotional on-stage death reinforces the image of the powerless yet virtuous wife who dies a brutal, unjust death.

## II. Desdemona: Murdered by Good Intentions

Desdemona offers an intriguing case, since she appears to be balanced between the hyper-masculinity associated with Lady Macbeth and the comic, sexualized femininity of Mistress Quickly. Similarly, however, Desdemona and Quickly suffer significant losses of lines in their respective Quarto versions. The absence of Desdemona's Willow Song (IV.iii.30-51, 53-

55) and Emilia's defense of women (IV.iii.84-101) in the Quarto limits the possibility of feminist readings, compared to the Folio.

Desdemona is characterized throughout the second half of both versions as the virtuous, hapless wife who is ensnared in Iago's plot and suffers the abuses of an increasingly jealous husband. Powerless against these political and linguistic manipulations, she has no choice but to hope that her love and obedience to Othello will ultimately redeem her. It is these selfsame values that ultimately lead to her death. Yet, in the play's opening, she causes quite a social uproar by marrying a black man without her father's knowledge.

Desdemona appears much sooner than Lady Macbeth, with only two scenes having elapsed in *Othello* compared to four. However, the immediacy of her appearance is not a confident assertion of on-stage presence. Rather, she is called as an auxiliary witness as Othello is put to 'trial' before Brabantio and the Venetian nobles. She does not speak of her own accord either, rather responding to the question posed by her father: "Do you perceive in all this noble company/Where most you owe obedience?" (I.iii.178-179). Aware of her father's leading question, Desdemona is able to manipulate the patriarchal hierarchy in order to declare her unwavering loyalty to her *husband*, regardless of his race or nationality. At first, she attempts to soothe her father's threatened ego, calling him "the lord of duty" (I.iii.183). She interrupts this patrimonial logic with a brilliant linguistic shift: "But here's my husband" (I.iii.184). By exchanging one male figurehead for another, she is able to justify her rebellious marriage by confining herself as male property. Brabantio has no choice but to begrudgingly accept the marriage. He obeys not only the patriarchal implications of marriage, but also the wishes of the higher ranking Senate. Thus, a hierarchy exists among men and not just between men and women. However, men possess greater access to political mobility or change in status.



By allying herself with a man who is culturally considered an outsider, Desdemona is committing a brave form of social estrangement. However, as a woman of noble class, she is able to commit this act of defiance with little consequence, since Othello is also a celebrated and respected military figure. In fact, it is his military valor that encouraged her to break with custom. When the Duke stations Othello at Cyprus, Desdemona begs to travel and be alongside him. She states that she married “the Moor to live with him, /My downright violence and storm of fortunes/May trumpet to the world” (I.iii.248-250). Her speech is clearly unapologetic, but the structure of this section is interesting. Rather than defending her marriage with elaborate rhetoric, she sees her illicit marriage as a destructive force of nature. While provoking images of power, visibility, and presence, this is a double-edged metaphor. The storm she began will inevitably lead to her own destruction and the Turkish defeat. This may or may not be dramatic foreshadowing cleverly disguised in affectionate speech. This subtle subordination theory becomes more feasible as she utilizes words such as ‘subdued,’ ‘consecrate’, and ‘bereft’ in order to emphasize her devotion (I.iii.253-257). It is also noted in the Quarto that Desdemona’s heart answers not to “the very quality” (I.iii.250) of her husband but instead to his “utmost pleasure.” This “openly sexual formulation” (Greenblatt 397) makes Desdemona sexually subordinate as well.

By refusing to play the part of the sequestered, anxious hand-wringing wife, Desdemona is also asserting a partnership based not just on intimacy but immediate proximity. This is a power Lady Macbeth fails to exercise when her husband becomes king. While this should be a power that works in Desdemona’s favor, the cruel irony is that Iago can manipulate her physical closeness to exponentially foster Othello’s jealousy.

Desdemona's physical change of locations, from Venice to Cyprus, does play a key role in her perceived level of power. In Venice, she is the daughter of a senator and among other fellow Venetians. The intersectional interactions between class and race thus serve as distinct advantages when she negotiates her place in the hierarchy between genders. Othello as a Moor, non-Venetian, and military general occupies a different sphere of influence that is best exerted in Cyprus. To elaborate, Cyprus is not Venice, so his outsider status does not overpower his military value. Kristeva's description of marginality allows for a focus on the 'positionality', rather than the essence, of femininity as a possible source of oppression (Kristeva 166). To elaborate positionality, Kristeva sees the various degrees of freedoms and non-freedoms allowed by women determined by social class, educational access, and of course environmental factors. McConnell-Ginet broadens Kristeva's positionality theory by showing its applicability in linguistics. She describes studies in which a woman in a room full of men will behave and speak differently. Many would expect no change to occur if the same woman is surrounded by other females. However, if these women are of a different social class or ethnicity, structures and choices of speech will shift (McConnell-Ginet 109). Different environments can also dictate how much access a woman has to male, female, or mixed gender audiences.

In Venice, the scene where Desdemona is present is dominated by men, but they are of her race and class. In Cyprus, she and her lady in waiting Emilia are again hopelessly outnumbered by males, but there is a shift in hierarchal agency since Othello occupies the rank of commanding general. Lacking the occupational skills and language of warfare, Desdemona is naturally confined to domestic spaces and affairs. This logic makes Othello's address of "my fair warrior!" (II.i.178) to his wife comedic in its affection.

While not able to wield swords or fight in armor, Desdemona does prove herself a warrior capable of verbal parry. When Iago denigrates his wife, Emilia, in front of Cassio, Desdemona offers a sarcastic remark: "Alas, she has no speech!" (II.i.106). While this is an ironic statement that undermines Iago's accusation of having a scold for a wife, it also laments Emilia's lack of response in her own defense. The quandary displayed in this moment shows the privileging of male speaking. If a man speaks his mind consistently and openly, he is not compared to a woman who emasculates and insults her spouse. Rather, it is Iago who is the scornful slanderer (II.i.116) who heaps abuses upon his wife, whose replies are cramped into abrupt, timid single lines. Desdemona's single line instances include exclamations, a curse, and a command for Iago to find something positive to say about a woman (II.i.120). She is met with the unsatisfactory misogyny that Iago harbors towards his own wife, who he suspects of having slept with Cassio.

Thus, Desdemona's attempt to break free of patriarchal assumptions is foiled by the male obsession with controlling female sexuality. It is only when Othello suspects her of having committed adultery that he begins to treat his wife poorly. Iago treats Emilia poorly from the very beginning, convinced that she has violated the tenets of being a virtuous and complacent wife. This complacency belongs not just in the home but also demands attention to simple household tasks. In other words, beautiful and witty women like Desdemona are inevitably going to commit adultery because they refuse to conform to the male-mandated label of 'wife.'

No such sexual jealousy or possessiveness occurs between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. Perhaps as a result of her unsexing, the threat of sexual competition disappears since she no longer represents the two-faced woman Iago is so quick to condemn. With the removal of this sexual component, however, the sexual attraction between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is greatly

diminished. The passion between Othello and Desdemona, however, is based on the bravado of the dangerous adventures Othello had survived. This hypermasculine portrayal combined with the exoticism of a non-Venetian is the potent aphrodisiac that united such an unconventional pair. However, it is when Desdemona changes her role from attentive listener to a well-intentioned advocate that Iago's deadly plan begins to take effect.

After Cassio is dismissed from Othello's service for a drunken brawl, he appeals to Desdemona, not only because she is Othello's wife, but also because there is mutual respect between the spouses. Desdemona would assume not just the role of messenger, but the masculine title of diplomat. Painfully unaware of Iago's manipulation, Desdemona assures Cassio that she will not rest until she restores his favor with her husband. Like Lady Macbeth, she is traversing the boundary between the private/female and public/male sphere, but does not mimic forceful, commanding male language. Instead, her speech is structured in the form of reassurances, confident in her standing as Othello's dutiful wife. Mistakenly, she assumes that this obedience demanded of her will garner respect and attention.

The attention this determination produces will prove lethal. However, the fact remains that Desdemona displays a level of feminist agency because she believes her words will influence male-male relations. Her vow to "perform it [friendship] to the last article" (III.iii.21) echoes Lady Macbeth's determination to carry out Duncan's murder. There is a distinction between these two women, however. Lady Macbeth verbally manipulates her husband to perform male deeds of regicide and murder. Desdemona foolishly places herself as mouthpiece and ambassador, ambitiously testing the boundaries of gendered socio-political roles.

Even in attempting to bridge her domestic position to that of the political, Desdemona's language is double-edged. When telling Cassio of her plan to change Othello's mind, she describes

how he “shall never rest/I’ll watch him tame, and talk him out of patience./His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift./I’ll intermingle everything he does/With Cassio’s suit” (III.iii.22-26).

Even though the structure of her sentences displays the power of resolve, there is naiveté evident. If Desdemona tires her husband with constant pleas for Cassio’s restoration, she not only plays the part of the irritating wife but one that disrupts domestic harmony. If the domestic is disturbed, sexual dysfunction is more likely.

Desdemona’s choice in words such as ‘school’ and ‘shrift’ also suggest that she plays the role of teacher and priest, both masculine roles in Shakespearean England. These roles also heavily rely on words of instruction, guidance, and maintenance of social order. This makes Desdemona a breathing contradiction, since femininity is regarded by various institutions as a wellspring of weakness and disorder. What Desdemona is promising Cassio seems nothing short of ridiculous and inconceivable in the eyes of the patriarchy.

Her method of appeal, however, should be acknowledged for its logic and organization. Like a skillful lawyer, she points out Othello’s unwillingness to grant Cassio an audience, despite his previous honorable conduct. She also discusses how Cassio accompanied Othello when he “came a-wooing” to her presence (III.iii.72), fulfilling his role as supportive friend and even orchestrator of their marriage. Desdemona’s wish for him to be reconciled to such a friend is framed by her as a necessity, no different than a wifely duty to keep her husband well fed and comfortable (III.iii.79-81). This combined with Desdemona’s willingness to obey him is what temporarily frees him from Iago’s manipulative spell, claiming that “chaos is come again” when he does not love her (III.iii.93). This chaos is certainly emotional and psychological for Othello, but also speaks to maintaining the stability of society. If women emerge from the domestic

sphere and begin to interfere in public matters, patriarchy (translated as normalcy) would be challenged. Since Desdemona is not present for this revelation, she is not aware of this fear.

When she does have a chance to appeal to Othello, it is after Iago has planted suspicion in his mind. It had been implied that Othello has poor vision, both physically and metaphorically. While unable to see Iago's destructive intentions, Othello demonstrates his nearsightedness when he cannot make out the torch lit figures in Act I (I.ii.29). It is Iago who explains the presence of "the raised father and his friends" (I.ii.30), establishing himself as an allegedly reliable witness. Othello's inability to see properly, when combined with his wife's inability to choose words with political care, accelerates the growth of his obsessive jealousy. Desdemona describes the distressed Cassio as a 'suitor' (III.iii.42), which can have two meanings. Cassio's 'suit' that Desdemona is advocating seems the appropriate context for this word, but 'suitor' can also be defined as a man wooing a woman into marriage. Othello's mind, contaminated by Iago, could grasp the less pleasant connotation. Unaware of these implications, Desdemona continues to press Othello to reconcile Cassio to his presence. This request is not only for Cassio's sake, but her own. She is so emotionally affected by his plight that "he hath left part of his grief with me/To suffer with him" (III.iii.54-55). While this may be a reflection of Desdemona's sensitivity, the audience is painfully aware that Iago can twist this trait to further his destructive agenda. Desdemona's emotional investment in Cassio as a friend can be painted as intimacy, indicative of possible adultery.

Like Lady Macbeth, Desdemona in this moment is participating in a form of 'interactional language,' which announces a person's self and attitudes (McConnell-Ginet 49). The content of Desdemona's appeal is nearly equivalent to Lady Macbeth's, since both speeches urge male figures to perform tasks at female bidding. The 'expression of content,' or the manner

in which content is communicated (McConnell-Ginet 50), represents meta-messages such as stance and tone. These stand as guides, clues for possible responses from the person being addressed. The expression of content can also influence the way an audience views a character's personality.

While Irigaray protests against pairing the feminine with deficiency, McConnell-Ginet points out that there is a gap between feminist theory and real-life experience, as demonstrated by linguistic data. She asserts that "feminist observations make it imperative for linguistic theory to address...how it is that notions of some users are more successfully encoded than those of others" (McConnell-Ginet 64). If Lady Macbeth and Desdemona are engaging in a similar mode of speech at similar points in plot development, why is audience/reader perception about their characters different? The answer lies in their degree of control over men in the public sphere. Lady Macbeth is able to utilize her husband, deceive noblemen, and shape a hierarchal rise. Desdemona is unaware of Iago's destructive plans, places herself in the service of Cassio, and shows unwavering devotion to Othello even as he grows abusive.

Again in comparison to Lady Macbeth, Desdemona does not begin scenes with any sort of monologue. She is either speaking to Cassio or someone below her in rank. In Act III, scene four, she has an interaction with a clown that emphasizes her linguistic passivity. She addresses the clown as an inferior with 'sirrah' (III.iv.1), which not only points out their class difference but is also a linguistic attempt at confident superiority. Yet, Desdemona is unable to control the exchange. As she is made the unknowing target of Iago's plots, she is also vulnerable to the clown's jokes. He cleverly takes the words she uses and transforms their meaning, displaying how her inquiries in the male world lack stability (III.iv.3-20). Her words also fuel the clown's comedy, which makes her the victim of mockery. She seems to recognize this as she admonishes

the clown (III.iv.7), but it is probably more a product of exasperation. The darker comedy that this scene foreshadows is her eventual death, since she initially refuses to see that her male-mimicked statements are to her detriment.

When she realizes her handkerchief is missing, there is a sudden shift in her attitude. She expresses anxiety to Emilia over losing it, but also expresses a subconscious fear of Othello's reaction. In a way to almost convince herself, she explains how even if "her noble Moor/Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness/As jealous creatures are, it were enough/To put him to ill thinking" (III.iv.23-27). While the ideas articulated here are positive, the structure of her speech acts as an unprovoked response to a question unasked by Emilia: would Othello be angry that the handkerchief is gone? This question has nothing to do with jealousy, yet Desdemona mentions the word. This is a moment of realization for the once naïve woman, realizing that if her love token is gone it could suggest she gave it to another. Emilia asks about her fear, but is met with a childish answer about Othello's birthplace baking jealousy out of his body (III.iv.29-30). This phrasing could also be an attempt to transform Desdemona's anxiety into humorous ease. The geographic specificity hints to the audience that perhaps Desdemona places her faith in Othello because he is an outsider. Why should he be like Emilia's husband, who is a misogynistic Venetian? Othello's race does not discount that he is a man, but does lower him among European men on the social hierarchy. This could be the crucial element to the quasi-equal nature of their marriage.

There is no linguistic equality in their interactions after Othello discovers her handkerchief is missing. His questions and replies are curt, but Desdemona has no choice but to follow his conversational cues. Both he and she know the handkerchief is lost, the conversation accelerating into frenzy as Desdemona lies, saying it is not lost but refuses to produce it



(III.iv.84-86). Othello's desire for a tangible reminder of Desdemona's faithfulness speaks to male anxiety concerning female sexuality. Virginity was a way of determining that a man had sole access to a woman's reproductive function, leaving the legitimacy of his heirs uncontested and his sexual prowess unthreatened by previous sexual experience. As Othello demands the handkerchief, Desdemona demands that he grant an audience with Cassio. The handkerchief in this interaction is a symbol of Desdemona's virtue, misplaced and fantasized by Othello as in Cassio's hands. Therefore, Desdemona's appeals in and of themselves are incendiary, further reinforcing Othello's belief that she has given away sexual and political favors.

What is interesting about the handkerchief drama is that Othello is to blame, as Desdemona argues (III.iv.94). He is the one who rejected her offer of it when he complains of a headache (III.iii.288), dramatically articulated in the script as a gestured cuckold's horn. When Desdemona reaches for it, Othello orders her to "Let it alone" (III.iii.293). If he is so keen to abandon the symbol of Desdemona's fidelity, then he is telling the audience that her guilt has likely already been determined. Thus, her attempts at interactional cross-gendered conversation are doomed by male judgement of her sexual behavior.

Desdemona does not see herself or her actions as the source of Othello's anger. She is discomfited by the alien emotion of navigating "the blank of his displeasure/For my free speech!" (III.iv.124-125), a feeling that did not exist in her interactions before her marriage. She attributes his strange moodiness to "Something sure of state, /Either from Venice or some unhatched practice/Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him, /Hath puddled his clear spirit" (III.iv.137-140). Reminiscent of excuses made by battered wives for their attackers/spouses, Desdemona is just not capable of seeing the growing storm. By blaming his uncharacteristic behavior on gender-occupational forces, Desdemona is facilitating a verbal retreat. Instead of

expressing confusion and outrage as Emilia does, she recites her line as if she were conditioned to defend her husband like a ‘good wife’ always should. At a poignant moment of repetition, Desdemona scolds herself for thinking ill of Othello, calling herself an “unhandsome warrior” (III.iv.147). Recalling Othello’s previous address, Desdemona uses a negative adjective but retains the male-associated label of a fighter. Indeed, she is fighting. Fighting to be heard by her husband, but only in the name of another man, undermines her personal agency. When she does speak, however, she is left behind by Othello. This is both verbal and literal, since he leaves the handkerchief scene abruptly after cursing (III.iv.95).

This is a great insult, since he is depriving a female speaker of her intended audience. Just as Desdemona is unable to control his attention, so too is Othello unable to control the power Iago’s words have on him. If the characters were to be categorized according to class, race, and level of verbal power, Iago, Othello, and Desdemona would follow in order of descending political power. As a Venetian man, Iago is able to move and speak more freely than the foreign Othello, but it is Desdemona who is most powerless in these interactions. Emilia highlights this powerlessness when she asserts “jealous souls will not be answered so. /They are not ever jealous for the cause, /But jealous for they’re jealous” (III.iv.154-156). Acting as Desdemona’s foil, Emilia is cognizant of how fickle human nature can be because she is not blinded by devotion to her spouse. Desdemona’s affection, and the obedience that springs from it, is a handicap that prevents Desdemona from navigating the consequences the political realm inflicts on the domestic.

The verbal abuse rapidly accelerates to physical abuse in the next scene, a moment where Desdemona’s cousin Lodovico arrives from Venice. A major shift in the political environment occurs with his delivery of a letter, with the order to place Cassio in Othello’s office

(IV.i.227-229). Desdemona, not being privy to the letter's contents, once again attempts to assert herself as Cassio's ambassador. She appeals to her cousin to heal the "most unhappy [division]. I would do much/T'atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio" (IV.i.224-225). Othello's jealousy, now combined with bureaucratic adjustment, manifests itself as one of the strongest performances of masculinity: violence. Lodovico reprimands Othello, shocked to see that the man he respected in Venice would be so changed in Cyprus (IV.i.237-238). Desdemona does not rise to her own defense, eliciting praise from her cousin for being a true obedient lady (IV.i.244). This affirmation from another patriarchal male should convince Othello of Desdemona's wifely virtue, but his sexual possessiveness prevents him from seeing the true nature of his wife's words and actions.

Desdemona's inability to assert her innocence stems partly from her devotion to Othello but also because he never clearly articulates his suspicions. In other words, Desdemona is able to "understand a fury in your [Othello's] words, /But not the words" (IV.ii.33-34). It is here that McConnell-Ginet's assertion holds true: "Meaning is a matter not only of individual will but of social relations embedded in political structures" (McConnell-Ginet 180). By utilizing the only (domestic) type of language available to her, Desdemona is unable to comprehend Othello's language which is corrupted by plots that occur in a different (political) world. She hopelessly reaffirms her role as Othello's "true and loyal wife" (IV.ii.36) but also questions why he sees otherwise. She explicitly asks "To whom, my lord? /With whom? How am I false?" (IV.ii.42). She is not met with an exact articulation of Othello's fears, but an impassioned weeping rebuttal that orders her from his presence (IV.ii.44).

It could be argued that Othello's impassioned state is equivalent to Macbeth's when he sees Banquo's ghost. If this were the case, then the reader could argue that Othello's jealousy has

‘unmanned’ him, making him incapable of clear communication with his spouse. Unlike Lady Macbeth, however, Desdemona does not attempt to verbally reshape her husband’s masculine reason. Instead, she tries to comfort her husband without defending herself. Her reasoning for why Othello is upset is articulated as empathizing for his change in occupational status. Yet, she removes a vital net of protection when she urges “If haply you my father do suspect/... /Lay not your blame on me. If you have lost him, /I have lost him too” (IV.ii.46-49). Evocative of her speech before the Venetian senate, she is again proclaiming allegiance to an increasingly violent husband and removing protective leverage of the relationship to her father. Unable to convince him of her fidelity to the institution of marriage, Desdemona appeals to another social institution to proclaim her innocence: religion (IV.ii.85). By saying she is a Christian and will therefore be ‘saved,’ she is foreshadowing her martyrdom..

Othello exits after another brutal verbal assault on Desdemona’s character, but Desdemona senses for herself the finality of their encounter. When a bewildered Emilia asks about Desdemona’s state, she replies that she feels “half asleep” (IV.ii.101). Just as Lady Macbeth expresses her madness in the state of sleepwalking, Desdemona is experiencing a physical state that blurs the line between conscious reality and uncontrollable dreams. One could assert that she is simply exhausted from the argument with her husband, but the reference to sleep reminds the reader of Lady Macbeth’s ‘to bed, to bed’ insistence. Sleep as an imitator of death is a common Shakespearean trope and is found in the Sonnets, so Desdemona’s articulation of sleep not only signals her desire for rest, but pre-emptively determines the location where her murder takes place.

This state of half-sleep is also accompanied by an outpouring of strong emotion. Desdemona, unable to speak or weep in response to Emilia, requests that she bring Iago into the

room. This act of augmenting a male presence in what was briefly a female only interaction shows a subconscious desire for patriarchal validation. Desdemona asks Iago if she is “that name.../Such as she [Emilia] said my lord did say I was” (IV.ii.121-123). Her inability to articulate the word ‘whore’ as easily as Emilia displays a state of shock. Desdemona could even be attempting to remain pure by avoiding the utterance entirely. This would be understandable, since its meaning is wielded by men who are humiliated by female infidelity. By refusing to voice the word ‘whore,’ Desdemona is refusing the association between it and her person. While a form of linguistic selectivity, there is circumlocution in her phrasing that dilutes the strength of this instance. In her appeal to Iago, she does acknowledge her willingness to speak the word, with a clever pun to reinforce the unjust nature of Othello’s accusations: “It does abhor me now I speak the word” (IV.ii.166). By playing with linguistic sounds (abhor rewritten as ab-whore), Desdemona is implementing the Latin pre-fix which translates as a ‘movement away from something.’

Before her appeal to Iago, Emilia ponders if an “insinuating rogue, some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office, /Have not devised this slander” (IV.ii.135-137). Her volume increases as she envisions the death that this manipulator should suffer, to the point where Iago compels her to “speak within door” (IV.ii.148). Even with the visibility and audibility of her friend’s thoughts, Desdemona is more concerned with absolving her perceived guilt. The societal pressure to be loved and respected by her lord is not just for Desdemona’s sake, but also justifies the actions she has committed in the name of love. Emilia points out that Desdemona had denied other suitors, her family, and friends in Venice for Othello’s sake (IV.ii.129-131). If her marriage is crumbling, Desdemona is desperate to enlist the aid of a villain unknown to her. This villain

assures her that Othello's mood is only due to politics, relying on the wall built between gendered realms to create a sense of false security.

This combined with Desdemona's desire to please her husband creates dangerously blind submission. Without the slightest question to his intentions, Desdemona obeys Othello's command to "get...to bed on th' instant" (IV.iii.7). Desdemona is also instructed to 'dismiss' her attendant, diction that is questioned by Emilia (IV.iii.13). According to the OED, 'dismiss' is defined not only as a removal from an office, but a forceful form of bidding departure. Othello's use of this severe verb should be a subtle verbal cue to not just the audience, but to his wife that something is amiss. Yet, Desdemona's "love doth so approve him/That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns-- /Prithee unpin me-- Have grace and favour in them" (IV.iii.18-20). Her lack of awareness is underscored by the articulation of her disrobing. Now, not only is she mentally and verbally vulnerable but also sexually. Not quite in her nightgown (IV.iii.33-34) and yet not properly dressed, she could be erotically perceived as semi-nude.

Desdemona's "Willow Song" is a similar form of ventriloquizing that Lady Macbeth engages when she reads her husband's letter. The song is not of Desdemona's creation, but rather that of her mother's maid. Her mother is not an appearing character and has not been mentioned until now. The song itself describes a heartbroken lover, the willow tree acting as a symbol of disappointed love. The song begins with natural rhyme and repetition, but interruptions occur in the latter half (IV.iii.46-51). Desdemona seems to have forgotten the words. The pauses between articulations resemble the disjointed communication of Lady Macbeth's mad speech, with the lapses in memory appearing to be the result of distress. The loss of words not only robs the song of its meaning but also robs the audience of female ownership of the lyrics. If Desdemona is unable to recount them, the artistic labor of her mother's maid is discounted. The fragmentation

of this artistic piece undermines the song's value as a structured form of expression. It does not equal Lady Macbeth's mad speech, but is not the best example of female language possession.

The Willow Song can be read as a conventional form of Elizabethan entertainment. Songs are common in other Shakespeare plays, with *As You Like It* and *The Tempest* among the list. The fact that the Willow Song is presented in fragments, however, suggests a loss of female oral tradition and a disregard for the preservation of womanly creativity. Before Desdemona can search her memory for the missing words, she is distracted by what she believes to be her husband's knocking. The last few verses (IV.iii.53-55) are then supposedly no longer objective but instead apply poignantly to Desdemona's dilemma. The final lyric offers an unspoken thought that Desdemona may be finally articulating: "If I court more women, you'll couch with more men" (IV.iii.55). The first betrayal, committed by the man of the song, reinforces Emilia's argument that men teach women to be unchaste through their own behavior (V.i.84-89). While no different from the previous rhyming sentences of the song, it does offer the scorned female lover a level of sexual independence. Is Desdemona considering what other physical experiences await if her marriage ends? After all, it is she who urged the Venetian senate to allow her to accompany her husband for the sake of physical intimacy. Her sensual appetite is therefore highlighted compared to Othello's, despite the fact that she is a loyal wife. The final lyric also suggests that sexual freedom is allowed not just to the male but the female, the phrasing implying that the non-monogamous relationship yields pleasurable outcomes for both parties.

Emilia takes this possibility even further, transforming female sexuality into a pursuit of not just pleasure but political power. She dares anyone to challenge her assertion of "who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?" (IV.iii.74). When Desdemona strongly denies her involvement even for the world, Emilia replies that those with power have

the privilege to say “’tis but a wrong in your own world, and/you might quickly make it right” (IV.iii.79-80). This is another moment where Emilia acts as a pseudo-male mouthpiece in Desdemona’s world. Full of cynicism, rationality, and a dose of comedic irreverence, Emilia is the female role model that Desdemona should emulate if she wishes to speak on her own behalf. Emilia presents women as sensual human beings equipped with sight, smell, and desire for pleasure no different from their male counterparts (IV.iii.95-100). If women are abused, controlled, and dominated by “peevish jealousies” (IV.iii.87), then it should be little surprise that women seek comfort elsewhere.

The subordinate, ‘good wife’ rhetoric Desdemona relies on to placate Othello does not check his suspicion. It does not prevent his escalating abuse. It does not, most importantly, save her life. Even as Othello explicitly articulates killing her unrepentant self (V.ii.33), she cannot comprehend that he would have the capability to kill her. In beautifully pitiable, almost childlike, rhetoric, Desdemona exclaims “Why I should fear I know not, /Since guiltiness I know not, but yet I feel fear” (V.ii.40-41). The choice to not explicitly articulate the word ‘innocent’ and instead embrace the charged connotation of ‘guiltiness’ magnifies the wrongness of her death. She even points out that it is unnatural to kill for the sake of loving (V.ii.45), displaying the ironic disparity between the words Desdemona speaks and the murderous actions Othello plans to commit. Desdemona attempts to save her life by calling forth a male advocate, the now silenced Cassio. Othello’s choice of words is eerily prophetic of his method of murder. He says that ‘honest Iago’ has ‘stopped his [Cassio’s] mouth’ (V.ii.78-79), which will also happen to Desdemona as she is smothered.

Unlike Lady Macbeth’s abrupt offstage suicide, which can be reconfigured as a valiant act of independence or just punishment, Desdemona’s on-stage death is preceded by a great



build-up of dialogue. She weeps at Cassio's betrayal and begs Othello to let her live one more night (V.ii.87). Perhaps a miracle will arrive in the delay, but Othello is too invested in executing his righteous vengeance. Denying her final request to "say one prayer" (V.ii.91), Desdemona adopts the mantle of martyrs, wrongfully killed for advocating a system of beliefs. Instead of Christianity, however, it is Desdemona's adherence to the patriarchy that muddies her perception. As she retreats further into her denial, her linguistic powers gradually regress from those of an independent, loving woman into that of a fearful child.

Desdemona's death cries are pleas for an intervention that comes too late with Emilia's arrival. There is no ambiguity here as in Lady Macbeth's death, where the offstage cry could be her own or those of her ladies discovering her corpse. Emilia's arrival is not caused by Desdemona's agony, however, but to report to Othello news of the public realm involving Cassio and Roderigo. Desdemona's murder would have been invisible entirely if she had not cried out: "O, falsely, falsely murdered!" (V.ii.126). As Emilia rushes to her side and demands to know "who hath done this deed" (V.ii.133), Desdemona names herself. Is this a moment where she recognizes her inability to persuade her husband otherwise? Is she realizing too late that her desire to transplant wifely speech into the political world was dangerous? Her phrasing suggests an acceptance of institutional punishment as a consequence of her actions.

Emilia is ultimately the one who reveals Iago's true intentions to Othello by confessing the circumstances of finding the missing handkerchief. For unravelling his political plot, Iago stabs and kills Emilia, who dies by Desdemona's side singing a piece of the willow song. By mirroring her mistress' death, Emilia represents how even politically-minded women are not spared patriarchal punishment for their adoption of honest male speech. Ironically, if Emilia were to play the ideal woman, she would have heeded Iago's command to "charm her tongue"

(V.ii.190) and lived. Desdemona's charmed and eventually silenced tongue did not do her this justice.

### III. Mistress Quickly: The Comedic Linguist/Feminist

Mistress Quickly is unique from the previous two women not just because of her language, but also because of her social class and functionality in the play's plot. While Desdemona and Lady Macbeth are wives of noble birth futilely attempting to manipulate the politics of the male realm, Mistress Quickly is a housekeeper in the country town of Windsor. The setting is a clear indicator of why Mistress Quickly and the other characters speak in a more rural dialect, or what Quickly aptly calls "an old abusing of...the King's English" (I.iv.4). However, Shakespeare's playful experimenting with the English language does not exempt the Welsh and French characters, Hugh Evans and Doctor Caius. Therefore, the linguistic manipulation can be read not just as a comedic instrument but as a form of subtle nationalism, where foreign not-quite-English characters are made a mockery for their inability to assimilate completely.

For this section, both the Folio and Quarto versions will be analyzed according to the scenes and lines that Mistress Quickley speaks. The Folio and Quarto present some discrepancies, especially when determining who is playing the Fairy Queen in the Herne's Oak scene. The Quarto also presents the plot in an accelerated timeline, as demonstrated by Giorgio Melchiori's comprehensive introduction in the Arden Shakespeare publication. Due to the accelerated pace and varying scene placement of the Quarto production, Melchiori argues that the Quarto text is a reconstructed version of a versified, authorial text (Melchiori 56). He presents both the Folio and Quarto texts as different not in the nature of good/bad, but in terms of differing audience and functionality. The brief Quarto text would be more advantageous for a

smaller cast that requires double roles, while the context of the Latin lesson and the Knights of the Garter Speech would be lost on more rustic audience members. While many playgoers in London would have consisted of more educated merchants and upper class elite, it is more likely that these scenes were best utilized in court performances where the language and ritual is more immediately understood (Melchiori 82).

With this context in mind, this research is not concerned about debating the pros and cons of the Folio and Quarto versions. However, a brief overview of their differences seemed appropriate, since Mistress Quickly's lines drop from 252 in the Folio to 114 in the Quarto (Melchiori 84). This is a near 55% decrease of speech and stage presence. Most likely this decrease occurred because Quickly is easily seen as a peripheral figure. She is not directly affected by Falstaff's antics like the wives nor is she competing for the hand of a beautiful woman. Neither is she involved in the third subplot, which includes the deception of two parodied foreigners. Instead, she is a comfortably domestic working-class Englishwoman, full of the typical regionalisms that groundlings would expect to recognize from their experiences.

What is not immediately recognizable, however, is that Mistress Quickly's low level of visibility enables her to have the most freedom of movement. She enters scenes often unsummoned, aware of the goal she has to achieve with each interaction. Unlike Lady Macbeth and Desdemona, there is no entity of a husband on stage that could influence her verbal exchanges. The people she often speaks with, instead, are women and fellow clowns. It appears necessary to take a moment and differentiate between the role of a 'clown' and that of a 'fool'. Fool figures, especially the one in *King Lear*, often serve as political mouthpieces and clever critics of a tragic hero's fatal flaw. Clowns, in contrast, appear to serve a purely comedic

purpose. They can achieve laughter either through stereotypical exaggeration or deliberate dullness (Hornback 221).

Quickly presents an odd exception to this rule. She is neither idiotic nor markedly simple. Instead, her language is dominated by regionalisms which have developed due to her class. Just because she speaks in dialect, unlike Desdemona and Lady Macbeth, doesn't mean that her words are less capable of exerting power. Indeed, if it weren't for the constant 'running around' of messages and letters that Quickly conducts the wives would never have gotten revenge on Falstaff. Anne and Fenton wouldn't have married either if it weren't for the secret, witty encouragement of the Doctor's housekeeper.

Mistress Quickly is introduced in the Folio version of Act I by ordering John Rugby to act as lookout for her master, a Frenchman named Caius. If he were to find anyone in the house without his knowledge, then a torrent of comically broken English would follow (I.iv.5). This is a signal to the audience that Caius, like the Welshman Hugh Evans, is linguistically incapable of assimilation despite not yet knowing his nationality. After hiding Simple in the closet, Quickly engages in a simple song refrain (I.iv.39), perhaps sung as she is performing daily tasks. This instance of singing, unlike Desdemona's Willow Song, is meant to act not as a form of narrative but as camouflage. It is an artificial performance meant to convey natural business, but also acts as a coping mechanism for the trickster Quickly as she anticipates her master's arrival. It is after Caius arrives that Quickly engages in her first aside to the audience. This is a linguistic tool that neither Desdemona nor Lady Macbeth utilize. By speaking to the audience and indirectly explaining the possible comic outcomes, Mistress Quickly is exercising a unique power allotted to comics: accessibility to knowledge. This resource in turn acts as accessibility to kinds of language that effectively display, hint, and foreshadow events. Quickly's hope that Caius will not

find Simple is short-lived, but she is able to soothe his “horn-mad” (I.iv.45) behavior. She urges him to not be so ‘phlegmatic’, since Simple was only in his house on behalf of another man. This moment is one of many malapropisms that Quickly commits, where phlegmatic would be more appropriately replaced with ‘*choleric*,’ the humor that suggests anger and hot temperament. However, the audience is able to gauge her meaning through situational context. A similar misuse happens when she expresses her relief to Simple about Caius’ calm letter writing: “If he had been so thoroughly moved, you should have heard him/ so loud and *melancholy*” (I.iv.85-86).

While these malapropisms, dubbed *Quicklyese* by Melchiori, could be seen as a lack of education or understanding, Quickly’s ability to twist the utterances of words and retain their meaning speaks to the arbitrariness of language. Words themselves, as Derrida argued, lack meaning until the speakers or listeners assign ones relevant to their experience (Derrida 72). Therefore, Quickly’s misuse of words is not only a comedic play on the similarities found in the English language, but it also a demonstration of a woman molding language within her realm of understanding. Mistress Quickly is in a unique position to accomplish this, despite her lower social class and diminished visibility.

Even though she acknowledges Caius as her master, she “keeps his house, and I wash/wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and drink,/make the beds and do all myself” (I.iv.89-92). By claiming mastery of these domestic tasks, Quickly seems to be implying that without her, Caius would not be able to subsist. In a greater argument, how would men survive if they didn’t have women who knew how to cook, clean, and raise children? Is Quickly implying that women are responsible for the stability of common society? She describes it as a “great charge” to take care of a household (I.iv.95), but is able to act as messenger outside of Caius’ home. In fact, very

rarely do we see her performing household tasks in the scenes she appears. Could this be a moment of clever stratagem, a purposeful exaggeration of domestic strenuousness in order to disguise Quickly's role in events? This is a feasible possibility, supported by her supposed statement of disinterest in the matter (I.iv.80-81). Unlike Desdemona and Lady Macbeth who forcefully and disastrously contend for their place in the male strata of society, Mistress Quickly relies upon her subordinate role and its attached meanings in order to increase the surface truth of her deception.

Without Mistress Quickly, there would have been no love match. Knowing both Evans' and Caius' plans to possess Anne, she plans on creating a happy outcome for the not so favored Fenton. After Caius declares his intent to win Anne, he tells Quickly that if he is not successful she will be terminated from service. By relying on the Early Modern English article of "an", Quickly is able to play the reassuring role until it seems Caius is out of hearing. Instead of "Anne", Caius will instead have "An –fool's head of your own...Never a woman in Windsor/knows more of Anne's mind than I do, nor can/do more than I do with her, I thank heaven" (I.iv.117-120). Playing the trickster with both actions and language, she is able to release herself from verbal obligation to Caius as a suitor's emissary.

When Fenton does ask Mistress Quickly about his chances with Anne, he is met with a description of how "We [Quickly and Anne] had an hour's talk of that wart" above Fenton's eye (I.iv.140). This is strikingly similar to the sighing lover in Jacques speech (*As You Like It*), where the ridiculousness of love fixates on a lady's eyebrow. Quickly is utilizing this same confidential symptom of lovesickness in order to encourage Fenton's suit.

In an economic lens, Mistress Quickly supposedly makes a profit by advocating on Fenton's behalf. In the Folio, he offers her an unspecified sum, but it seems to be enough to

provoke the positive reaction of Quickly's 'commending' of Fenton's qualities to Anne, as well as a promise to "tell your worship more of the wart next time we have confidence/,and of other wooers" (I.iv.147-148). In the Quarto, however, Fenton only offers Quickly "a brace of angels to drink" in Scene 12, which also suggests an indefinite but a far more generous amount of reward. The phrasing of this sum would also likely resonate with what Melchiori calls an 'elsewhere audience' (Melchiori 36), or people who fit the class and background of the *MWW* characters. In summary, the fact that Quickly is a paid advocate casts her in the light of other forgotten women who had domestic industries and were employed by the theatres, as demonstrated by Natasha Korda's research. In Act III, Fenton gives her another sum when he bids Quickley to deliver a ring to Anne (III.iv.98). This second offer of fiscal reward encourages Quickly to do what she "can for all three, for so I have/promised and I'll be as good as my word –but/speciously for Master Fenton" (III.iv.104-106). Money aside, Fenton appears to be the only suitor who treats her with respectful gratitude. Caius threatens to "turn your [Quickley's] head out of my door" (I.iv.115), while Slender seems incapable of forming any sort of intelligible thanks.

After this exchange between male characters, Quickly is not seen again until Act II, scene 1, where she intends to meet with Anne but is instead accosted by Mistresses Ford and Page, who want to tell her about Falstaff's letters. They exit the scene and talk privately, an indicator of how they plan their revenge. Lady Macbeth does not have any on-stage female confidantes. While Desdemona has Emilia, their intimate conversations are placed on stage for the audience to witness. The wives desire revenge on Falstaff but need an intermediary face, a party that could speak to Falstaff not as a class equal, but as a comic equal. The overarching theme of *Merry Wives*, tricksters deceiving fellow tricksters, is embodied in Quickly's interactions with Falstaff.

Upon her first delivery of messages from Mistress Ford to Falstaff, Quickly engages in deliberate tangents that act as devices of delay. In order to increase Falstaff and the audience's impatience with the next developing event, she uses obsequious language in order to undermine her position of power. She 'prays' him to come closer, while feigning good humored indignation at his wanton behavior towards a married woman (II.ii.54-55). Falstaff asks again about Mistress Ford, only to be met with a long gushing speech about the lady's fine qualities. Quickly's phonetically garbled usages of 'canary' for quandary, 'rushling' for rustling, and 'alligant' for elegant (II.ii.58-65) lend comedic flavor to the demonstration of rustic dialect. By confidently speaking her dialect and embracing its comedic and communicative effect, Quickly's character is not doing what Lady Macbeth and Desdemona attempt: the utilization patriarchal male language. Her deliberate use of hyperbole also mirrors the stereotype that male language is analytical and straightforward, while feminine speech is seen as emotional and overly detailed. These negative meanings are questionable, since Quickly is able to use this very language to her advantage.

As an informed confidante of the wives, Quickly may not be the Jove of Windsor but she is the very necessary Hermes. In fact, Falstaff refers to her explicitly as a "she-Mercury" (II.ii.76). Quickly delivers her message in unabashed style, stating that Mistress Ford's husband will be 'absence' from his house tomorrow, but warns him about his 'jealousy' nature (II.ii.79-85). Is it possible that Quickly's garbled language is able to act as a false security measure for Falstaff. If a woman cannot properly communicate the 'fartuous' (virtuous) (II.ii.92) nature of Mistress Page, or describe the terrible rage of a jealous husband, why should a greedy knight hesitate in his plot? This possibility is never explicitly articulated by Falstaff, but from a reader's perspective, it may be another reason for why Quickly is quick (no pun intended) to win Falstaff's trust. While a reprehensible character, Falstaff voices a legitimate doubt to Quickly's



credibility when she reveals she has brought messages from both wives. He is not concerned, however, that both know they have received the same letter. Rather, he is worried that they have “acquainted each other how they love me” (II. ii.104). Quickly is perceptive enough to make a subtle joke at his expense, crying “O God, no, sir: that were a jest indeed! They/have no so little grace, I hope; that were a trick indeed!” (II.ii.105-106). Her use of the words ‘little grace’ plays upon the sexist belief that the wives cannot be clever enough to discover this circumstance. However, the use of Quickly’s double negative lost in the stream of exclamations, shows that it is really Falstaff who is the butt of the joke. The true jest is that they would or could love Falstaff at all.

Mistress Quickly is able to procure Robin, one of Falstaff’s pages to act as another resource of negotiation (II.ii.106-108). She claims that Mistress Page desires it, perhaps something that resulted in the private offstage conversation in Act I. An interesting preface to the Latin lesson occurs in lines 120-122, where Quickly describes another tangent which consists of a moral platitude: children are to be kept from wickedness and remain innocent. This theme of purity is also linked to the dual honesty and merriment of the wives, Ford’s jealousy, and Anne Page’s disobedience. While there are forms of social rebellion taking place in the play, many of them are for the moral agenda of teaching husbands to trust their wives and to marry for love. The comedy that ensues from the Latin scene is not only Quickly’s misunderstanding of words, but a social commentary about the usage and prevalence of sexual language.

Mistress Quickly herself is difficult to picture as a sexual being in this play. While she lacks a visible husband figure, Mistress Ford calls her “foolish carrion” (III.iii.178). The Arden footnotes claim this is a humorous rather than insulting phrase to describe an old body, but the negative connotation remains incipient. While Lady Macbeth’s body appears to be desexualized

heteronormatively through her Act I speech, Mistress Quickly is desexualized because her body is seen as no longer sexually fit. Or, to extend sexist logic further, her aged body would likely bear indicators of previous sexual, and thus undesirable, experience.

Quickly's most recognizable and comic malapropisms are rooted in sexual meaning. When she speaks with Falstaff after the buck basket incident, she appeals to his vanity by utilizing the deferential address of 'your worship'. She uses the same address with Fenton and Falstaff as a way to distinguish their different classes. Pleading with the knight to meet with Mistress Ford again, Quickly defends the woman by asserting how she scolded the men who discarded Falstaff in the river. Quickly blames the servants for mistaking their 'erection,' the proper word being direction for where they were to take the heavily loaded basket. Falstaff pounces upon the sexualized word, bemoaning how he relied upon his own "to build upon a foolish woman's promise" (III.v.40). Clearly, being tossed into dirty laundry and the Thames would discourage a rogue, but Quickly is aware that the wives need him for extended mockery and to teach Ford that his jealousy is fueled by misleading doubt.

Quickly is able to detect this resentment and transforms it into a desire for amends. The urgent framing of her request holds the false promise of the lady's sincerity: "I must carry her word quickly; /she'll make you amends, I warrant you" (III.v.44-45). The stating of a time, between eight and nine (III.v.44), adds more reason for urgency since it appears as a non-negotiable sign of desire for private exchange. By catering to his vanity and lust, Quickly is able to ensure that he arrives at the time the wives appoint. She adds to her artificial humility by answering in one sentence replies that address Falstaff as 'sir'. One of these, however, corrects Falstaff for mistaking the time of his arrival (III.v.51). These abrupt answers also act as linguistic

catalysts to cement the conversation, so Quickly can exit before Falstaff doubts intentions for the second encounter.

Before the second humiliation occurs, Mistress Quickly again communicates with Mistress Page, who is bringing her son William, to school. When she hears that school is cancelled, she desires Parson Evans to briefly quiz him in his knowledge of language. The infamous 'Latin lesson' is an example of witty contextual humor while also presenting language as a dormant being that is activated and interpreted in various ways by various listeners. Quickly's interpretation of *pulcher*, Latin for beautiful, to 'polecats' (IV.i.24-25) is a common term used to describe prostitutes. Quickly cannot fathom how women deemed sexually and morally filthy can be described as beautiful, or 'fair' in the words of Evans (IV.i.22).

Being unfamiliar with Latin as an uneducated woman, Quickly is taking the utterances she hears and giving them new phrasing based on the words she is able to access. While misunderstandings are often comedic, Quickly's word transformation cannot be called such. How can someone misunderstand a word if they do not have prior contexts to influence its meaning? While Derrida argues that language and meaning are constructed through processes of exclusion, Mistress Quickly has no Latin context to deny due to her lack of exposure. Another factor to consider is Evan's Welsh accent, which further muddles meaning and proves the flimsy substantiality of utterances. Evan's rendering of the Latin articles *haec-hoc* to *hang-hog* (IV.i.41) provokes Quickly to again consider what she has learned from experience: "'Hang-hog is Latin for bacon, I warrant you'" (IV.i.42). She performs the process again when Evans mentions the vocative case understanding of William is *caret* (lacking). Based on utterances Quickley is able to hear through the Welsh mouthpiece, the phrase is twisted into a crude form of 'fucking is carrot', according to the Arden footnotes. The phallic imagery associated with these words

cannot escape our she-Hermes, who comments that the “good root” (IV.i.47) makes for an equally good time.

Appropriated innuendos in the second half of the lesson yield a glance at Quickly’s perspective about female sexuality. *Genitive case* a la Evan’s Welsh becomes the case (slang for vagina) of the poor prostitute Jenny, who Quickly is apt to warn William of. She advises him to “Never/name her child, if she be a whore” (IV.i.54-55). A respectable man would never say the name of a woman he whored with, let alone admit that he committed such a gross act. Quickly then scolds Evans for teaching the child such words, the Latin articles transformed into dialectal symbols for drinking and fornicating (IV.i.57-60).

This exchange, present only in the Folio, refers to another one of *Merry Wives*’ overarching themes. While deception and comedy are key elements of the play’s success, there also needs to be morality which reinforces peace. Anne and Fenton, while disobeying the Pages, enter into the acceptable institution of marriage instead of becoming lovers. The wives perform circumstances of temptation but never commit adultery. Ford may be jealous but unlike Othello, does not kill his wife. Even after the wives inform their husbands of the plot, there is still Falstaff left to punish for disrupting social order.

It is only outside of the town of Windsor that completely fantastic, magical products of chaos seem to occur. The plot to frighten Falstaff in the context of fairies and Herne the Hunter makes one think of Puck and his antics in the green space of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Yet, the “ragg’d horns” and his shaking of “chain[s] in the most hideous and dreadful manner” (IV.iv.29-32) does not seem to match the lighthearted depiction of Robin Goodfellow or the bumbling Bottom. This legend is enacted as a folk tale, meant to caution people away from the realm of the woods/mythical/unknown. Irigaray would be quick to label the space of Windsor

male and the woods female. It is here also that femininity occupies a leadership role as the Queen of the Fairies.

This is another hotly debated topic when comparing the Folio and Quarto. In the Folio, Mistress Page gives the direction for her daughter Anne to play the role of the Queen, but this is markedly absent in the Quarto. The stage directions in the Quarto read “Enter...mistress Quickly, like the Queene of the Fairies” (Q. scene 17). Folio stage directions also indicate the same, despite the mention of Anne Page. Melchiori argues that Mistress Page’s line, like the elaborate and flowery tribute to the Order of the Garter, was a later addition inserted with respect to a courtly audience (Melchiori 36). The substitution of women for this role is striking, since it is making a statement about the ‘appropriateness’ of Quickly to impersonate a rank far above her station. Beyond social class, Quickly’s comic behavior and crass language do not match the notions of a queen, which were heavily impacted by Elizabeth I and her cultivated virgin mystique. Yet, Pistol does make a deliberate reference to “Our radiant queen” hating “sluts and sluttury” (V.v.46), which alerts the audience to the Fairy Queen as a paradigm despite the character performing her.

Nonetheless, Quickly appears as the Fairy Queen most likely out of the need for proper gender-cast placement. The wives are busy luring Falstaff to the oak and Anne needs to elope with Fenton while avoiding Caius and Slender. Therefore, it makes sense that Quickly would be the *de facto* Fairy Queen from a practical view, but the donning of this guise also speaks to the nature of her trickster character. The nature of the fairy scene itself is meant to deceive, blur the lines of reality, and provoke fear and awe in the eyes of the spectator (namely, Falstaff). Quickly’s role as the Fairy Queen therefore also embodies what it means to be an actor on the stage. Not only is the boy playing a woman who then acts at being a queen, but the dialogue

itself is fabricated. Falstaff reinforces this power of performance by admitting later “I...thought they were not fairies, and yet the/ guiltiness of my mind, the sudden surprise of my powers, /drove the grossness of the foppery into a/received belief” (V.v.121-125).

The suspension of disbelief, mixed with the elements of mystery and guilt, have strongly religious overtones. Falstaff can be seen as the penitent sinner, while Quickly as Queen orders the children-fairies to deliver righteous punishment like God. Her language as the Fairy Queen is radically different from her messenger voice. She speaks in rhyming couplets, an indicator of versification not quite in perfect iambic pentameter. She gives commands to her “orphan heirs of destiny”, “elves”, and “oafs” (V.v.39-57) to form the shape of the “Garter compass” (V.v.66) and write the French motto of Edward III in jeweled-tone flowers (V.v.69-73). The fact that this is omitted in the Quarto suggests other audiences would be unfamiliar with the motto and its meaning, but this is hard to prove.. In the Quarto, however, Queen Quickly abandons these formalities and orders her underlings to encircle, burn, and pinch the errant knight immediately.

The punishment of burning with candle ends is a possible indicator of meta-imagery for hellfire. Quickly in fact calls it “trial fire...if he be chaste, the flame will back descend/And turn him to no pain; but if he start, /It is the flesh of a corrupted heart” (V.v.84-87). Reminiscent of medieval tests for innocence and virtue, this one Falstaff painfully fails as Quickly taunts, “Corrupt, corrupt, and tainted in desire.... /About him, fairies,..../....pinch him to your time” (V.v.90-93). The commanding tone and verse that Quickly utilizes is clearly for performance, since her natural speech has already been witnessed in everyday interactions. It is here that again language proves itself a changeable and adaptive representation.

Falstaff’s public humiliation brings the play to a close before a new marriage is celebrated. It is fitting that his punishment is delivered by a woman, when it was virtuous women

he was attempting to seduce. The fact that the punisher is Mistress Quickly seems like a satisfying reward for her many efforts, while also acting as an opportunity for her to experiment with authoritarian language. Unlike Lady Macbeth and Desdemona, however, there are no ill effects for Quickly since it is ‘only a performance.’ It is here that the freedoms allowed to her meet their threshold. While lower in class, she is less visible and able to move freely. However, this lower visibility does impact when, where, and with whom she is able to speak. These are all contributors to a speaker’s level of power. Regardless, Quickly stands as an example of how performance and comedy can enable women to speak their minds with less punitive results.

#### IV. Discussion and Conclusion

When this research began, I was certain that Mistress Quickly’s appropriate place would be at the lowest end of the power-language spectrum. Upon analysis, however, I find this to be untrue. While Quickly does not murder kings or wield sexual power, she is able to use her words to persuade people and bring about change successfully. Desdemona, on the other hand, while a general’s wife and assertive at the play’s opening, does not accomplish her desire to reconcile Cassio and Othello. Neither does she defend or confirm her innocence in such a way that prevents her murder. Therefore, I find swapping their positions on the spectrum necessary for the sake of textual and verbal logic.

As McConnell-Ginet has pointed out, this power is often defined by who is the listener/receiver of words and their messages. Based on the cases of these three women, examples of masculine and feminine language, characterized as aggressive and passive, have appeared in different degrees at deliberate moments. Below, a table has been constructed which shows each woman’s number of questions, exclamations, imperatives, and misuses. These

criteria are meant to illustrate trends in linguistic choices as each woman's story is performed. Each choice represents either a strengthening or dilution of agency.

For example, instead of questions performing as active interrogation, they act as markers of self-doubt and reliance upon another's judgment. Exclamations are seen as intense expressions of emotion, indicative of madness, confusion, or agitation. Depending on context, however, exclamations can also function as a way of holding a listener's attention. Finally, as demonstrated by Quickly, comedic misuses show a woman's ability to experiment with the flexibility of language to a desired effect. Imperatives as a rhetorical device exert an air of aggressive and confident masculinity, so they will also be examined.

For the sake of clarity, all statistics will come from the Norton and Arden Shakespeare editions mentioned previously, the Quarto being in an appendix to the Arden. Different editions may reflect varying numbers of lines, but editorial accuracy is not what is at stake. Rather, these numbers are intended to show an increase or decrease in linguistic components that may explain the woman's dramatic fate. While the number of puns or questions is not the final answer to overcoming subordination, the data may offer clues as to how women may access empowering forms of language.

### **Cross-Play Comparison: Rhetorical Devices**

Character	Total Number of Lines	Questions	Imperatives	Exclamations	Misuses
Lady Macbeth	231	26	46	11	N/A
Desdemona (Folio)	364	61	29	16	N/A
Desdemona (Quarto)	335	57	26	15	N/A
Mistress Quickly (Folio)	252	15	27	20	9



Mistress Quickly (Quarto)	114	11	26	2	0
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The table makes more apparent the effects of Quickly's abridged role in the Quarto. There is less emphasis placed on her malapropisms and more attention given to the events between the Windsor couples and Falstaff. Even though Desdemona has 133 more lines than Lady Macbeth, she has a higher percentage of questions for speech (Percent difference between the two: approx. 57%). Mistress Quickly's number of exclamations also drops from the Folio to Quarto, making her less of a clown and more an auxiliary character, such as Nym or Robin. The volume and intensity often associated with exclamations could play a part in her comedic success in the Folio. Her malapropisms are also absent, robbing the play of its precious linguistic experimentalism. Of course, comparisons between tragedies and comedies are never exactly the same, but these rhetorical choices all play a part in how these women exercise their right of speech.

Shakespeare has been preserved, translated, performed, and taught for over four hundred years. The impact of his words is impossible to understate. No longer belonging to just the theatre, his writing has been incorporated into popular culture through film adaptations, comedic parodies, and commercial merchandise. The Bard's work has also become an essential requirement of public and private education, occupying a solid place in the literary canon. This widespread literary exposure carries the capacity for social impact and formation. These Shakespearean women demonstrate not only a spectrum of language uses, but personalities that speak to modern issues of spousal abuse, females in political offices, and how we define female sensuality. If gender equality is to ever be achieved, speakers must have access to all linguistic resources regardless of gendered context. Speaking without gendered privilege is to articulate

the complete human experience, which transcends binaries and promotes fluidity. Ideally, this produces a spectrum of articulation that sets standards for new communities of practice. These developments would lead to more representative narratives, which serves the growth and inclusivity of the feminist community. Combine these tenets with Shakespeare's popularity and egalitarian rhetoric could become the new normal.

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